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SUBJECT: THESSALONIKI: POLICE DEAL BLOW TO ANARCHIST VIOLENCE AT
ANNUAL ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS

REF: THESSALONIKI 63

11. SUMMARY: Thessaloniki police effectively contained over 6000 anarchists and other anti-government demonstrators during the 73rd annual International Trade Fair (September 6-14). Anarchists broke store windows and hurled Molotov cocktails, but unlike in previous years caused no injuries or serious damage. Pro-active, firm measures by the First Instance Prosecutor and police have contributed to a downward trend in anarchist violence during the Trade Fair. END SUMMARY

12. In contrast with previous years, Thessaloniki police prevented annual anti-government demonstrations from getting out of hand during the 73rd annual International Trade Fair (September 6-14). Labor unionists and anarchists traditionally demonstrate when the Prime Minister delivers his annual speech on economic policy (ref) at the Trade Fair. Though they often clash violently with police and cause significant damage to property, this year local authorities took special measures to contain protesters. Thessaloniki First Instance Prosecutor Floridis issued orders to police to arrest demonstrators who break the law, even if they seek refuge on the campus of Aristotle University near the Trade Fair grounds. (Note: Police do not usually enter the campus because of laws protecting the university's "asylum" status. This is the second consecutive year that Floridis has issued such orders. End note) The police deployed 2000 officers for the occasion and blocked access to the campus during the demonstrations, discouraging anarchists from their familiar practice of throwing Molotov cocktails at police and then hiding on campus.

13. On September 6, at about 8:00 PM, three groups of 6,000 protesters gathered at Aristotle Square and the Arch of Galerius (Kamara) in downtown Thessaloniki to converge at the YMCA square across the street from the south entrance of the International Trade Fair and the Vellidis convention center. At that time the Prime Minister was officially opening the 73rd Trade Fair with a keynote address on the national economy attended by senior government and diplomatic officials including the U.S. Ambassador, the CG and the DPO. Demonstrators included members of the General Confederation of workers (GSEE), Confederation of public servants (ADEDY), Labor Unions (PAME), farmers, miscellaneous left wing groups and anarchists. Police blocked protesters at the square and did not let them approach the Vellidis center. They remained there for two hours shouting slogans against the government's economic policy and left peacefully, passing in front of the Consulate where they shouted without stop a few anti-American slogans: "Killers go home", "take out the death bases".

14. A group of Anarchists while marching through the downtown area started smashing windows of the stores at Agias Sofias area hurling stones, wooden sticks, bottles and Molotov cocktails. Police responded quickly and effectively using tear gas and managed to round up 30 suspects. Police questioned the suspects, arrested 12 (ages 17-21 years, including 5 females). The Consulate building had extra police coverage and no

incidents took place in front of the Consulate or U.S. interests in the city. The Ambassador and all U.S. Mission employees departed the Convention Center safely after the speech.

15. COMMENT: The decline in anarchist violence during the annual Thessaloniki Trade Fair since 2006 (when anarchists torched cars and roughed up police) can be attributed at least in part to Prosecutor Floridis's highly publicized orders for police intervention, and to the police's increasingly robust response. Public and government pressure on police to reign in violent protesters also seems to be having an effect. Senior northern Greece police officials have expressed interest in receiving additional training from the USG (septel) that post believes would help officers combat anarchists and other persistent law enforcement challenges. Post will continue to encourage pro-active, cooperative police and prosecutor efforts.

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